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Developments in Indochina

FEPAC DIV
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State Dept. review completed

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DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA

SOUTH VIETNAM

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Fighting remained generally light throughout the country over the weekend. The Viet Cong are trying to push UN Secretary General Waldheim into allowing a PRG liaison office at the UN and are acknowledging privately that they face formidable handicaps in building international support. The head of Saigon's delegation to the bilateral talks believes he will be at a great disadvantage in the talks.

CAMBODIA

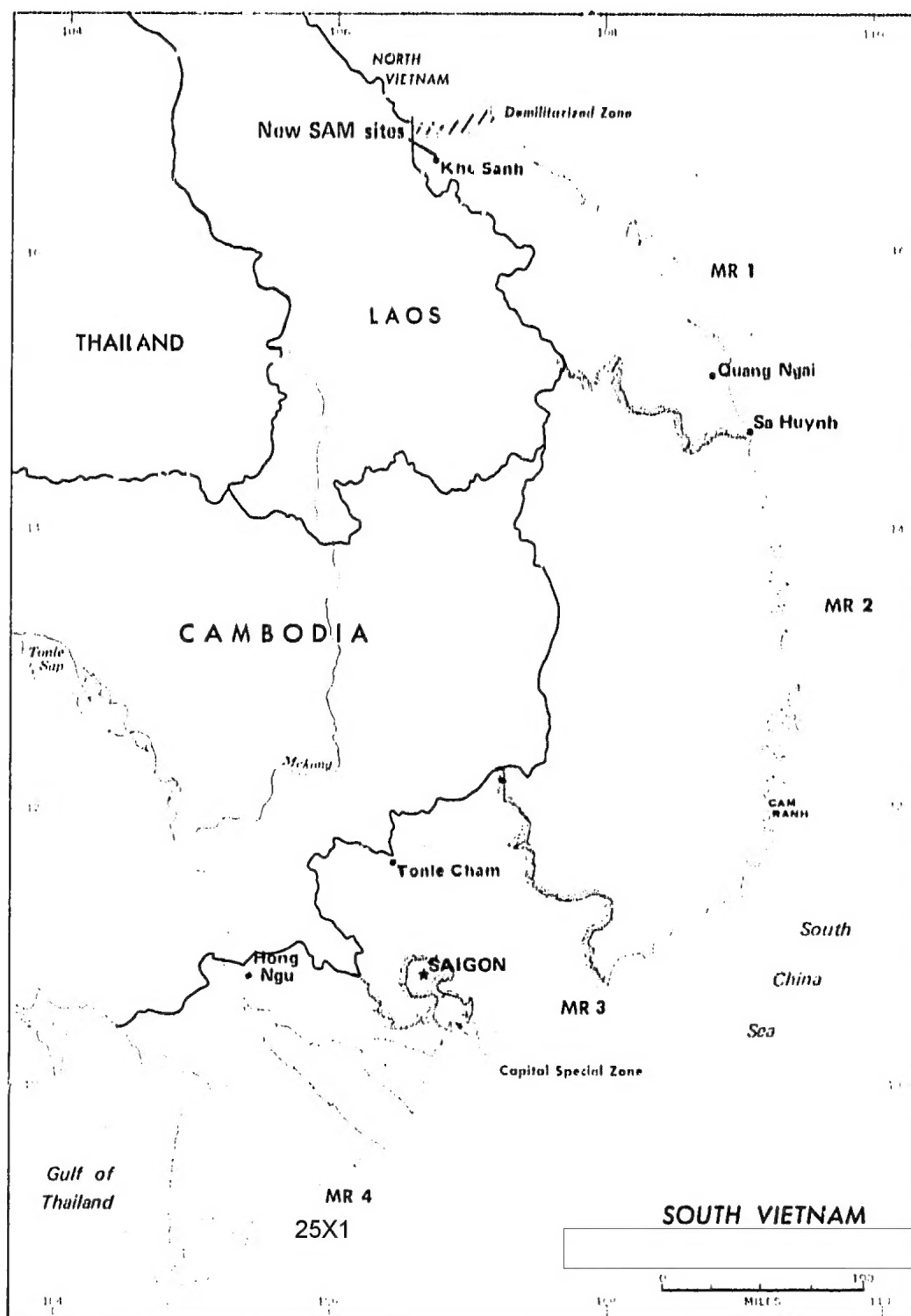
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Khmer insurgent forces are back on the attack along Route 2 and have again closed that highway between Phnom Penh and Takeo. The insurgents also are keeping up their harassing attacks along the Mekong River and have again closed Route 4 in the southwest.

LAOS

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Communist proposals on both political and military matters were presented to Souvanna on 29 March, suggesting that the Pathet Lao wish to begin serious discussions on implementation of the Lao peace agreement. There was little military activity during the weekend.



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SOUTH VIETNAM

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The Military Situation

Fighting remained generally light throughout the country over the weekend, although the Communists maintained their pressure against the government's Ranger camp at Tonle Cham in northern Tay Ninh Province.

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[REDACTED]

PRG Still Pushing For UN Presence

The Viet Cong are trying to push UN Secretary General Waldheim into allowing a PRG liaison office at the UN. No doubt concerned over indications that Waldheim, under heavy pressure, has backed off from earlier interest in the PRG request, the Communists have named a "permanent observer" to the UN. According to press ticker, the Viet Cong's envoy to Hanoi, Nguyen Van Tien, has been named to the post. The move apparently is designed to prevent Waldheim from quietly avoiding the issue.

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[REDACTED]

Viet Cong Political Problems

Once again, the Viet Cong are indicating [REDACTED] an awareness that they face formidable political handicaps in their drive to build international support, which they see as a vital part of their political strategy. Foreign Minister Binh, in a parting pep talk to Communist personnel in Paris before her departure earlier this month, conceded that international interest in the PRG-Saigon bilateral talks was waning, since the outside world now regarded the conflict as an "internal Vietnamese affair."

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Madame Binh also acknowledged that the rest of the world was not going to come knocking on the PRG's door to establish relations, and that a vigorous diplomatic campaign therefore was necessary. Lamenting over a general shortage of cadre qualified to serve abroad, Madame Binh said a number of experienced diplomats were recalled recently to serve on the joint military commission in Saigon. [REDACTED]

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Chief of GVN Delegation Pessimistic

The head of Saigon's delegation to the Two Party Joint Military Commission (TPJMC) sees himself going into the talks with the Viet Cong at a great disadvantage. General Thuan, in a conversation with US officials, complained that conflicting guidance and a lack of direct access to President Thieu will put him in a difficult position. He believes that the Communists view military and political matters as a single entity, and that they are able to come up with policies more rapidly and effectively.

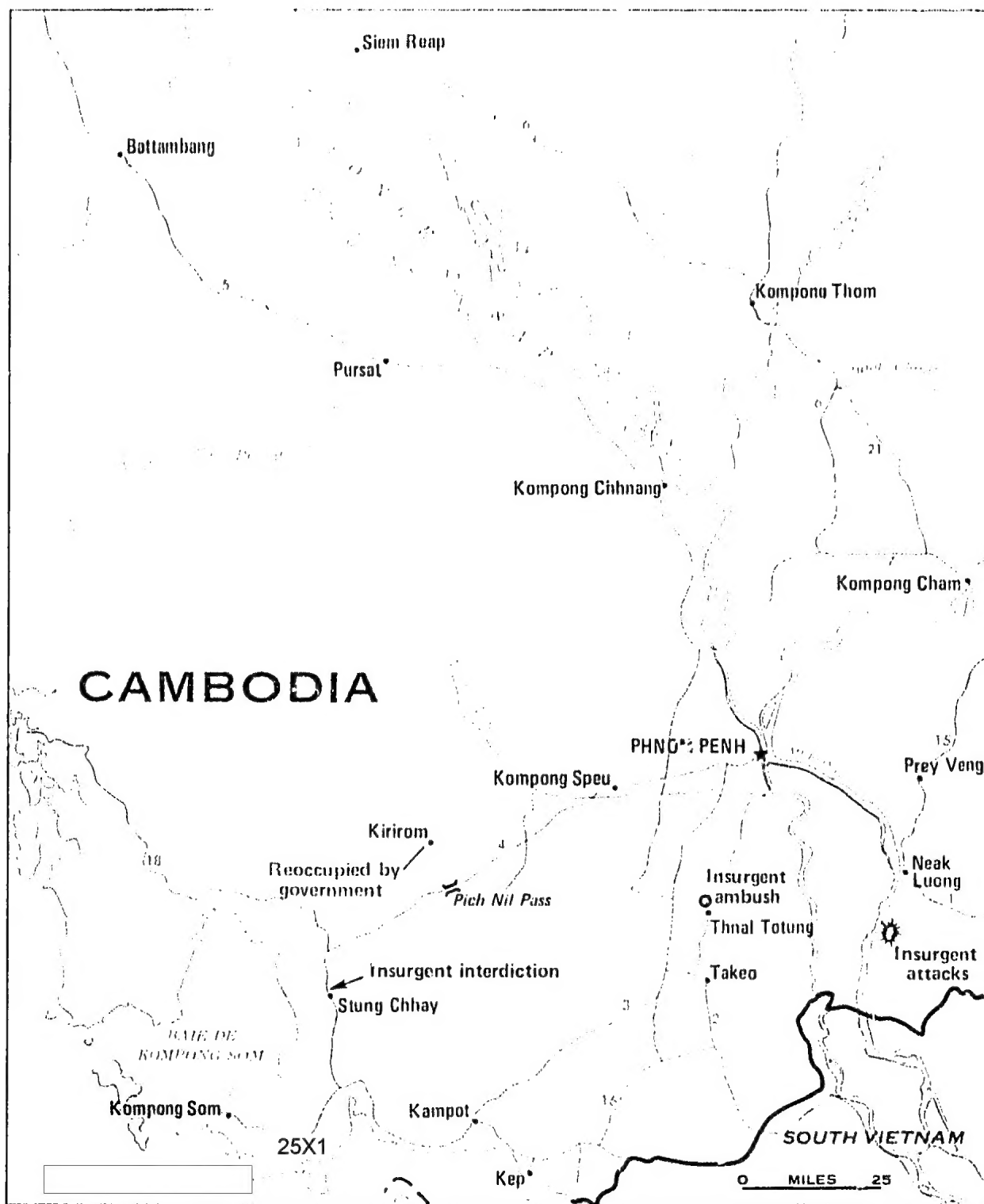
Discussing the first meeting of the TPJMC on 29 March, Thuan said that substantive issues had been taken up, with the Communists focusing on matters of security, movement, and immunities. Saigon's response was noncommittal and actual progress on these issues was negligible.

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CAMBODIAInsurgent Harassing Attacks

Khmer insurgent forces are back on the attack along Route 2 and have again closed that highway between Phnom Penh and Takeo. The sharpest action occurred near Thnal Totung, some 30 miles south of the capital. Insurgents ambushed an 11-truck munitions convoy in that area on 31 March and reportedly destroyed all of the vehicles. In addition, four 105-mm. howitzers were abandoned by retreating Cambodian troops.

To the east, the insurgents are keeping up their harassing attacks along the Mekong River. Shellings and ground probes against several government positions south of Neak Luong were carried out on 31 March. At last report none of the positions had fallen.

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In the southwest, Route 4 has been closed again in the vicinity of the village of Stung Chhay, some 50 miles north of the seaport of Kompong Som. After government units pulled out of Stung Chhay on 30 March, enemy troops evidently reoccupied the area. Elsewhere, belated reports indicate that on 29 March advance elements of a three-battalion government force entered the former resort town of Kirirom, north of the Pich Nil pass area of Route 4. Only light resistance was encountered. Kirirom was the scene of heavy fighting in the first months of the war and fell to the Communists in mid-1970.

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LAOSPathet Lao Proposals

The Communists apparently are ready to begin real discussions on the implementation of the Lao peace agreement. Pathet Lao negotiator Phoune Sipraseuth, during his meeting with Souvanna on 29 March, presented a lengthy document containing Communist proposals on both political and military matters. At the negotiating session with the government the next day, Phoune demanded that Souphanouvong be designated vice-prime minister and that the Communists be given top positions in the new coalition government in the ministries of interior, foreign affairs, public works, economics, and plans. The two sides agreed that if one side holds the top slot in a ministry, the other will be given the number two position.

Government chief negotiator Pheng Phongsavan rejected the demands for a Communist vice-prime minister and interior minister, but told a US Embassy official that Souvanna was prepared to make concessions on other matters. Souvanna has instructed Pheng to hold daily meetings with the Communists in an attempt to reach agreement in time for the mid-April ceremonies marking the Lao new year.

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Military Activity

The only significant military activity on the weekend occurred in the north where two enemy companies supported by heavy weapons fire drove government units from outposts some nine miles northeast of Pha Dong, a government base south of the Plaine des Jarres.

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